

Autism Acceptance Month



April is designated as Autism Acceptance Month, recognizing that true impact comes not from just an awareness of autism but from understanding and valuing neurodiversity and working to ensure meaningful inclusion.

What is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex, lifelong developmental condition that can impact how an individual learns, communicates, interacts with others, and perceives and experiences the world. It is often referred to as a “spectrum condition,” as it affects people differently and to varying degrees. Some individuals with autism may require significant support in daily life, while others may live independently with minimal assistance.

Identifying Autism

Autism is a neurodevelopmental difference, not a disease, and there is no known single cause. But individuals with autism can often benefit from therapies, interventions, and accommodations that help support their unique needs and abilities. An early, accurate autism diagnosis can provide the basis for appropriate educational and home-based support, and lead to improved quality of life. Too often, however, individuals are not receiving their autism diagnosis until well into adulthood.

There are currently no medical tests, such as blood work or brain scans, for diagnosing autism. An accurate diagnosis must be based on observation of an individual’s communication, social interaction, and their activities and interests.

Screening

All children should be screened for ASD during their regular well-child doctor visits at 18 months and 24 months, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

This is in addition to recommended screenings for developmental delays and disabilities at 9 months, 18 months, and 30 months.

Medical Diagnosis

Generally conducted by a psychologist, developmental pediatrician, or other specialized physician using an assessment of symptoms and diagnostic tests.

A medical diagnosis of ASD is most frequently made according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5, released 2013) of the American Psychiatric Association.

Educational Determination

Made by a multidisciplinary evaluation team of school professionals.

The evaluation results are reviewed by a team of qualified professionals and the parents to determine whether a student qualifies for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Supporting Individuals with Autism

Receiving an autism diagnosis can bring clarity, validation, and access to support and resources that improve quality of life. For children and adolescents, early intervention programs, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and social skills training can significantly impact their development. For adults, diagnosis can lead to self-understanding, college and workplace accommodations, access to therapy, and support groups that foster a sense of community and belonging.

How to Provide Neurodivergent Support

- **Clear Communication:** Use clear, concrete language. Ambiguous phrases or sarcasm may be confusing.
- **Accommodate Sensory Needs:** Be aware of sensory sensitivities and offer accommodations when possible (e.g., noise-canceling headphones, dimmer lighting).
- **Encourage Special Interests:** Celebrate and encourage interests and strengths, as they can lead to meaningful hobbies, careers, and a sense of purpose.
- **Support Routines:** If routines bring comfort, work within or around them to create predictability and reduce stress.

State and Community Resources

The Children's Autism Program, administered by Texas Health and Human Services, provides funding for applied behavior analysis (ABA) services to support young children with autism in improving communication, behavior, and daily living skills.

The Texas Center for Disability Studies at UT Austin works to advance research, education, and advocacy that supports full community participation for all Texans.

The Autism Society of Texas is a statewide nonprofit that provides education, advocacy, and community-based support to improve the lives of autistic individuals and their families.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently estimates that 1 in 31 children are identified with ASD. Based on this rate and Texas' population of over 31.8 million, **more than one million Texans may have autism.**

Advancing Autism Policy in Texas

In recent years, Texas lawmakers have approved a variety of measures related to autism. These include the following bills:

- **House Bill (HB) 3096** - Designated March 17 as "Profound Autism Awareness Day," to raise awareness of profound autism. This refers to a subset of individuals with ASD that generally have an intellectual disability, exhibit minimal spoken language, and require continuous care throughout the lifespan. *(Passed in 2025)*
- **Senate Bill (SB) 568** - Overhauled Texas' special education funding system by shifting to a service-based model, helping better align funding with the needs of students with disabilities, including those with autism. It will be fully implemented for the 2027/28 school year. *(Passed in 2025)*
- **Senate Bill (SB) 55** - Required the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to conduct a study to determine best practices for assisting students with ASD who are enrolled at colleges or universities. *(Passed in 2023)*

Sources for this document include The Autism Society of America, The Autism Society of Texas, AAP, CDC, and CPST Texas.